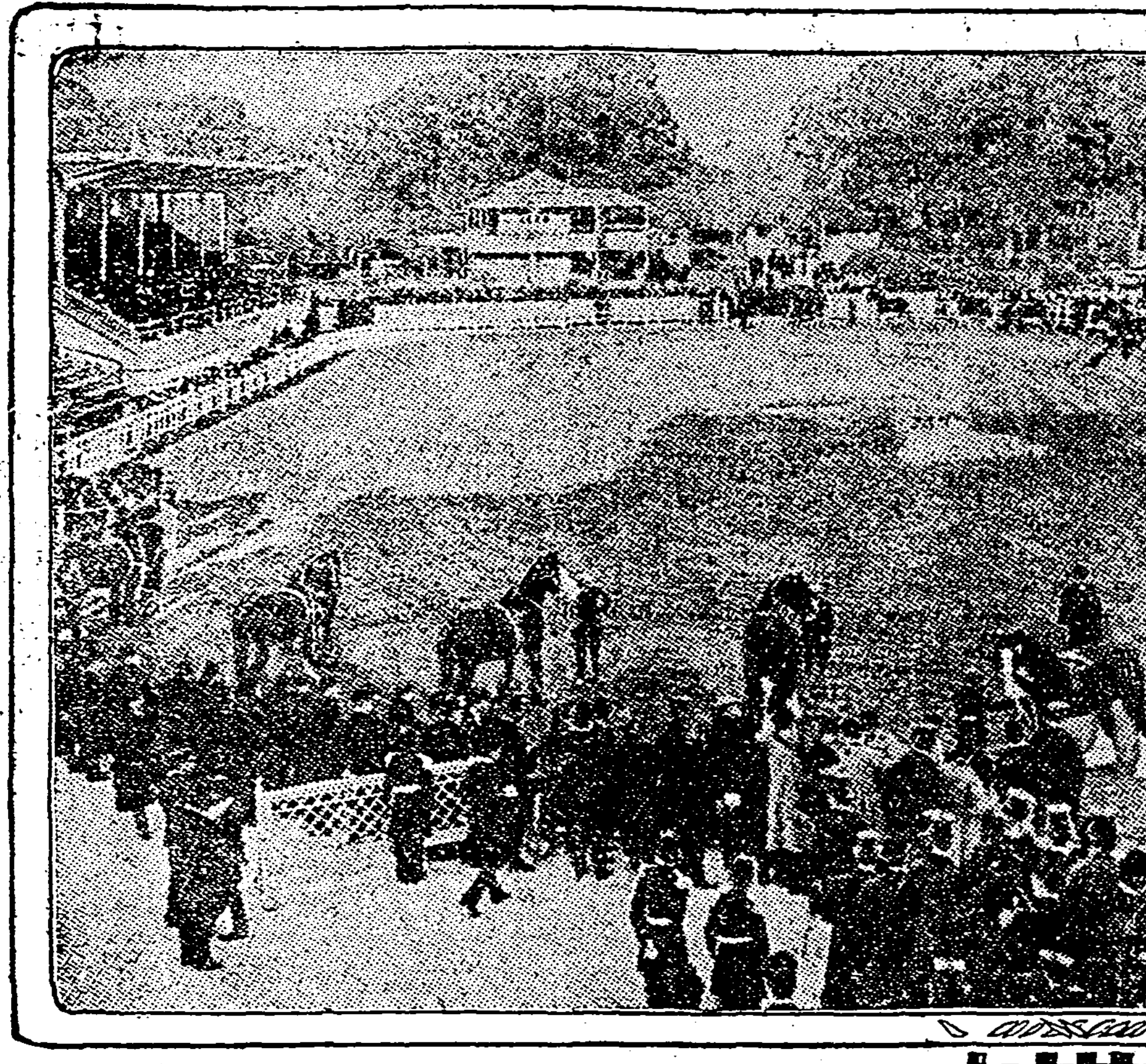


# THE WEALTHY ARGENTINE FARMER AMAZES CLEMENCEAU



Famous Horses of Argentine on Exhibition at a Horse Show.

By Georges Clemenceau.

This is the ninth of a series of articles giving his impressions of South America written by the former Premier of France.

ROMAN civilization ended in those "latifundia," which (many other causes contributing), are usually considered to have brought about the ruin of Italy. The immense estates of the Argentine estancieros were not built up like those of antique decadence, by the expropriation of a number of small farmers. They are simply the result of the wholesale seizure by a too well equipped humanity of a land over which there wandered some few vague tribes of unfortunate savages incapable of exploiting it. Without taking up the famous discussion as to the origin of all landed proprietorship, and without too closely examining to what extent our legal principles and our practice agree, I simply note the fact that the conquistadores and their descendants set down as *res nullius* what ever it suited them to appropriate.

The principle once established (this is the commencement of every civilization), there remained only to fix the approximate extent of land likely to satisfy the appetite of the European newcomer. Do you remember a fine story by Tolstoy, in which he relates the history of that man who was given by I know not what tribe of the steppes—as much land as he could walk around in a day? Once started, the sole idea of the poor wretch was continually to enlarge his area, until only by making a mad rush he was able to attain his goal, and at the same moment he crowned his effort by falling dead. The first occupants, who followed after the Genoese, took probably less trouble, though their greed was as great, but as land depended for its value on labor, the result for Tolstoy's hero and for the conquistadores was not so very different. Thus, when the first pioneers turned the first sod, the estate of whatever shape had to bear some proportion to human capacity. Therefore, the large domains of to-day—measuring from one to 100 square miles—are the result of the parceling out of larger ones, and by degrees, as the much-needed labor comes forward to undertake the task, we shall see the further carving up of preposterous holdings.

This is inevitable in the near future, and this alone will render possible these modern refinements of farming that at present none can afford to wait for. A farmer who knows nothing of manure or any sort, who is making his first experiments in irrigation, and who burns the straw of his flax for want of knowing how to utilize it, will for a long time to come continue to swamp the markets of Europe with his grain and his meat, on condition, however, that he will be satisfied with small profits and make up for inferior production by extent of surface. It is this which shapes life on the campo, such as I have tried to sketch it.

It remains for me to show the source of all this huge movement of cattle-rearing and agriculture, the head and chief who in his own person and that of his overseers, administers the pampas, the owner of the estancia, the *estanciero*. The word *estancia*—the thing signified having no parallel—is not easy to translate. Let us put it down as the most sumptuous form of primitive ownership. I might call it the seat of an agricultural feudalism if the peon were not a free man, democratic principle, if the two words could be coupled together.

When we meet him on the boulevard, the *estanciero* who talks of his immeasurable estate and his innumerable herds, seems to us a fabulous creature. It is quite another matter to see him on horseback amidst his peons in the pampas, which in defeated and its features that we are accustomed to see in private property in all times and all countries appears in its nakedness to be Nobody's Land, that is to say, Everybody's Land.

The contrast between the refinement of his person and the English comfort of his family abode, and the primitive rusticity of the surrounding country brings us back at once to the contradictions of barbarism undergoing the civilizing process.

As I have already observed, the results obtained are due to a progression of efforts in which the chief, even if assisted by an over-seer, necessarily plays a large part. For, although it is easy without overstepping the truth to dazzle the European with fantastic figures, it is wise to remember that success is not automatic, and that from the elements alone (to say nothing of the locusts) serious setbacks are at times to be expected.

M. Bassot, whose competence is beyond question, told me that having bought a vast estate, a series of agricultural experiments caused him such heavy losses that he decided to sell the place. Now, the value of the land had gone up, and the difference on the plots left uncultivated sufficed for him to recoup himself. "I should have made a lot of money," he concluded, "if I had worked none of my land."

This shows that in the Argentine as elsewhere there are risks to be run. The *estanciero* takes these risks, but if he were content to sit and wait, as the saying is, for the sun to bring up the value of his ground, he would not contribute so largely as he does to the wealth of the Rue de la Paix.

We are always being told that the

word dearest to Creole indolence is "mañana," to-morrow, but the exigencies of economic success tend daily to modify customs and weary of postponing business, the Argentine, like the Yankee, is more and more inclined to do overnight the work that might be put off to the morrow. At all events, absenteeism is unknown on the estancia, for this would spell ruin at short notice. It is true the *estanciero* has the reputation of mortgaging freely his estates, and, when a good harvest makes it possible, of hastening to purchase more, so as to increase cheaply his output. What can I say, unless that every economic error must be paid for sooner or later, and that in spite of whatever may remain of "Creole indolence," all are forced in the end to seek the profits in an improvement of the system of cultivation.

"Grand seigneur," I called him. A "grand seigneur" on colonial soil where his dwelling is a rustic palace that is something between a farm and a mansion. Simple in structure, wood being necessarily the principal element. All on the ground floor, according to colonial fashion. Large rooms in which is displayed the luxurious comfort of English life, with unimpeachable exterior both of furniture and service. Large and rich pieces of furniture belonging to the days when the slow circulation of all wares forced accumulation on the housekeeper. Large bookcases even, filled with heavy volumes that denote a time when the railway was not yet there to scatter on the winds small winged slices of human wisdom. Every convenience to drinking, painting, or, rather, pictures. Massive plate. Goldsmith's work won as prizes in cattle shows whose medals fill large frames, to say nothing of photographs of prize beasts. And, better than all, the hospitable reception of a time that will never return. Now that all humanity traverses without ceasing sea and land, the ancient hospitality has lost its meaning. There still linger some vestiges, however, in those countries where the civilizing process is not yet sufficiently complete to protect the traveler from unpleasant contingencies.

Let me hasten to add that among these one need not count the risk of starvation in an estancia. No doubt the abundance of cattle counts for something. But all the same to the account of the *estanciero* must be laid the credit of the manner of it, which is of the richest courtesy. I wish I could give unstinted praise to the "uphever," the "asado," of which I have before spoken. But I shall not be able to do that until the Argentine has got out of the habit of handing the meat to the cook while it is still warm, for this requires a power of mastication which European debility denies to our jaws.

All kitchen gardens are alike, and you cannot expect to find the pleasure gardens of an estancia laid out by a Lenôtre. Even if that miracle had been worked, what good would it be when the locusts had passed across it. In one estancia, near Buenos Aires, which is considered the handsomest in the Argentine, and which the kindness of its owner throws open to any foreign visitors, I beheld a park of a thousand hectares where amid the groves of tall trees there wander at leisure a number of animals intended to give an air of wildness. A few flocks of grey ostriches may perhaps have the illusion of freedom. Some handsome bulls stilled with care call exclamations of admiration, which burst forth afresh at every group encountered. The eucalyptus, planted sometimes singly, and sometimes in broad avenues, towered above us at a height no other tree could rival.

In this favored spot, the rich vegetation has nothing to fear from the locusts. Every species grows freely as it likes, or almost. For this reason, the overseer, anxious we should miss none of the rare species on which he prides himself, led us with an air of mystery to the edge of a low hill, where with an authoritative gesture he stopped us before an ordinary looking tree, destitute of leaves, which to me had a familiar air.

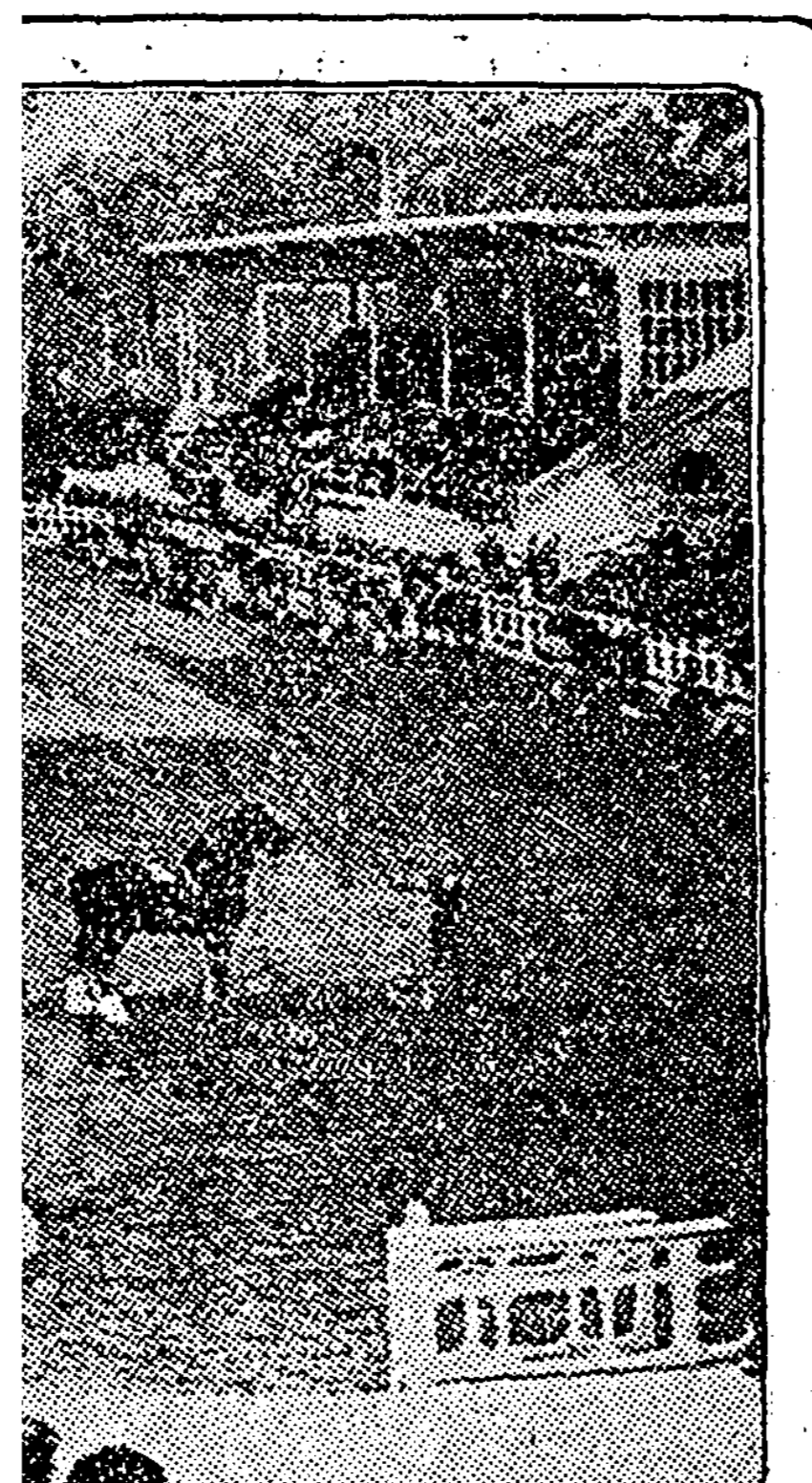
"Yes, it is an oak you are looking at. An old European oak in the Argentine. What say you to that?"

I admit obligingly that it is an oak, though at the same time confessing that I have seen others. And at the risk of evoking surprise, I acknowledge that it is not the European flora that most interests me in the Argentine Republic.

The special feature of this fine park is in the quarter reserved for the bulls. The specimens I saw as we went along, and which were later to be led past us, as at a show, are magnificent beasts which owe to a methodical and prolonged work of selection. The best English breeds are gloriously represented not alone in the beasts imported from Europe, but also in Argentine bred animals which would do honor to any country.

The management and staff of the stables, are entirely English. With British skill, stallions of world-wide fame are led past us so that we may admire their union of beauty of line with what is still more admirable, beauty of action.

Now were we to see the trainers at work, upon "wild" horses, since they belong to bygone days, but simply upon young animals that have not yet been ridden. As a matter of fact, the problem here is exactly the same as with us, but I beg leave to think that our system of solving it is vastly superior to the Argentine method.



The Small Farmer in Argentine.



The Small Farmer in Argentine.

the method. The colts are collected in an enclosure called the corral. They do not congregate upon a picture of the steed of Mazepa, with fiery eye and coat on end, for the greater joy of chromo-lithography. There is nothing here but the arid of youth and its free grace of movement. The object is to accustom them to man and his needs. This our Norman boys quickly arrive at by a mixture of skill and kindness, which does not preclude firmness of hand in repressing unruly movements.

The system of the Argentine peon is very different. First, he catches the neck of the animal to be trained in a loop of his lasso and leads him out of the enclosure to a piece of ground often but ill-prepared. There, with a few movements of the lasso, every limb of the beast is caught in a loop of the rope, so that the simplest movement must make the unfortunate victim lose his balance and bring him, heavily down, at the risk of breaking his bones.

The creature is terrified, naturally. Meantime five or six men run in upon him, each an expert in the special rôle allotted to him, and when the dexterous use of the cord has made it perfectly impossible for him to move, the bit is adjusted, and a sheep's skin saddle adroitly buckled. All that now remains is to place the animal on his feet so that the horseman may mount. The rope is then relaxed with the same ease as it was tightened, and the colt, on his four feet, firmly held by the head, his eyes blindfolded, might perhaps get over his fright if his two forefeet were not still tied together by a last knot to prevent his running away. The peon gives the signal, and as the last loop is removed he leaps into the saddle and urges his mount straight ahead, with the air of a wild beast and a lavish use of his riding crop.

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Perhaps there are exceptions. I did not happen to see them. On the other hand, I did see poor beasts that offered not the slightest resistance and whose angelic gentleness should have disarmed the hands, the legs, and also the throat of his executioner. It appears that when this performance has been gone through five or six times the colt surrenders at discretion. In the days when horses were wild upon the pampas, these practices might have had some excuse. We have different ideas of a training lesson.

All these different branches of work call, as may be supposed, for a fairly complete set of buildings. Consequently, around the master's house there are outbuildings of every style of architecture, which make of the estancia a sort of small village, whence radiates across the Pampas the whole organization of work.

This ordered and thus spent, life in the fields in a "solitude" broken at any moment by great herds and gauchos ever on the march, has nothing to daunt even a man who is most anxious not to lose contact with his fellow-creatures in these days of extreme civilization. Therefore it is not surprising that a stay of some months at the estancia forms an agreeable part of the programme which the daily life of the Argentine landholder forces on all his family. The railway is never far off, since it is the line that brings with the colonist the whole agricultural movement. The progression follows a normal course by the construction of about 500 kilometers or rails per annum.

The Provinces of Buenos Aires, of Córdoba, of Santa Fé, which alone furnish 80 per cent. of the agricultural exports, are naturally the most favored; and, also naturally, it is on the Pampas—the immense reservoir of fertilizing energy—that is concentrated the maximum of labor for the extension of the means of communication—which are so swiftly and richly remunerative.

Thus it is not too difficult to move about in the campo. Moreover, the motor car, running now on a road, now on the great green carpet, where movable gates

## Former Premier of France Finds an Interesting Study in Contrasts on the Pampas, the Seat of Agricultural Feudalism.

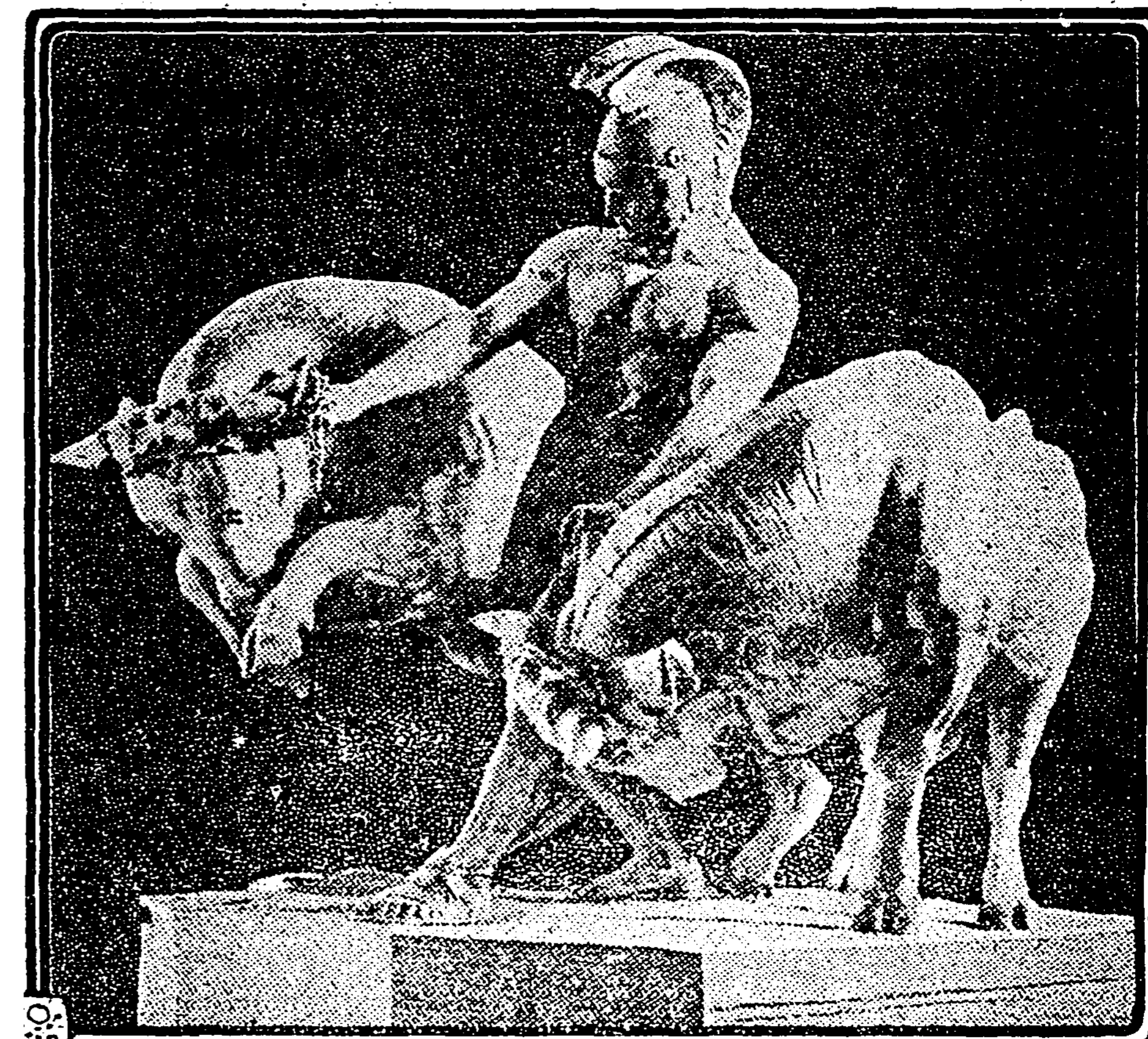
provide a passage through the wire fencing, facilitates a peasant interchange of neighboring relations.

I have said that absenteeism is unknown in the estancia. Often, the head of the family, when kept for some reason in the city, confides the management of the estate to one of his sons, who in this way turns to a magnificent account the grand energy of youth and manhood by employing it to carry forward an intensely interesting work. What more natural than for the family to gather in the fine Summer months beneath the shade provided by the great centre of fruitful activity, amid its herds so full of joyous life, to enjoy beauty of the harvest ripened by the warm kisses of the sun, beneath the pure sky of the

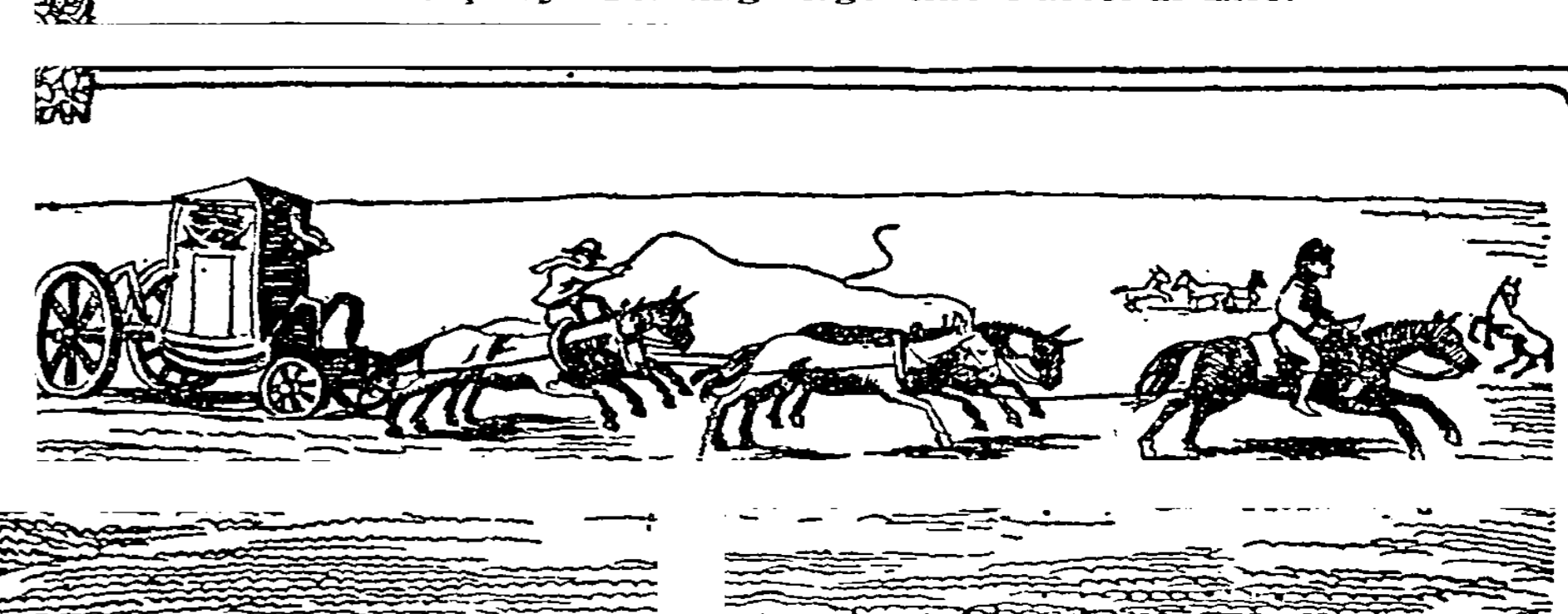
you cannot walk on the pampas without perceiving long ears that spring up out of the grass at every moment. The flesh has a poor reputation, perhaps only for the reason that here they neglected that elementary operation which follows immediately on the death of the animal in our country. The partridge, smaller than ours, lives alone. Its flesh is white and rather insipid. The martinette (tinamou), a sort of intermediary between the partridge and the pheasant, is the best of the pampas game. One may hunt it without turning to right or left, certain always of not returning with empty hands. The favorite amusement is the rabbit, or the "rope" and shooting from the motor car. For the "rabat" horsemen are needed.

until the rope reaches him to make off. Often he gets away out of reach. But there is such an abundance of game that there is no time to regret one animal that may escape. The important point is for the peons to keep well in line. else huntmen and horsemen are likely to get a charge of lead. At the Eldorado, M. Villanueva's place, this happened two or three times in the same day. The partridge, always solitary, and the martinette are birds that never weary

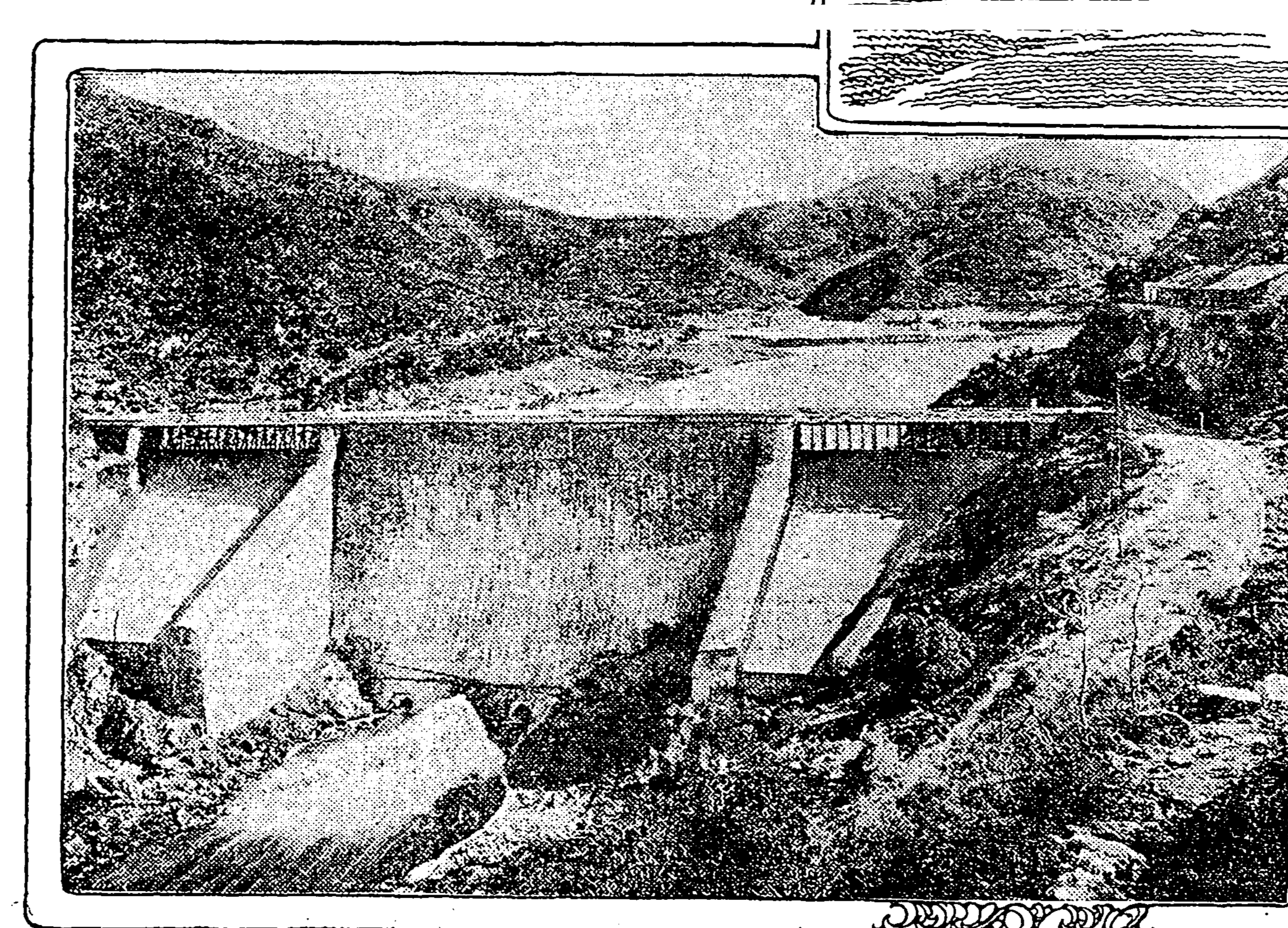
germ that cannot be returned to the soil to perform the eternal labor of fertilization. On all sides the last vestiges of clean and fretted bones tell us how lives now ended are taking on new forms of life, and in the gentle murmur of the grass that bends to the breeze the huge white skeletons that brave the blue of heaven have all the eloquence of philosophy in their tale of the supreme defeat of living matter beneath the irresistible triumph of fatality.



Group Symbolizing Argentine Pastoral Life.



Post Wagon on the Pampas Before Railways. (From an Old Print.)



The Dam of St. Roque.

long mornings. In the strengthening breeze which sets the blood coursing through the pulses with renewed force, and the rides are unending.

In Brazil, I heard people pity the Argentines because they lacked the resource of the mountains in the great heat of Summer. The Andes are indeed too far distant even with the railway that now crosses them. (The Transandin line is now working between the Argentine and Chile. Forty hours' run from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso or Santiago.) But the costly pleasures of a sojourn at Mar del Plata are quickly exhausted. The estancia offers a beautiful retreat of active and fruitful peace. There are visits to the farmers who little by little are coming to reside on the domain of the estancia, purchasing the ground originally taken on lease, and grouping themselves in such wise that villages are in process of formation; or the continual inspection of the herds, (rodos), watching over the harvest which suddenly spreads across the Pampas a superabundance of life; these are daily pretexts for trips that combine pleasure with usefulness.

The tall ricks grow in numbers, the grain falls to the smothering measure of smoking engines, the lean native cattle of the Pampas yield their place to monstrous Durhams, to Herefords, with their handsome white heads to Dorchesters to Bachelors to Lincoln sheep with their heavy fleeces. It is by no means certain that the amusements of Trouville or Vichy are of a superior kind to those of the estancia. We may be allowed to think that the gentleman farmer has chosen the better part.

I have said nothing of the shooting. We must admit that in this respect the resources of the Pampas are greater than those of our open coverts. Hares and partridges are on the programme as they are with us. M. Py told me he had tried to acclimatize the quail in vain. Some thousands of birds were let loose in a carefully chosen part of the Pampas and disappeared for good. The history of the hare is very different. About fifty years ago some Germans let loose a few couples at various points of the Pampas, and the same animal, which at home produces only one or two young each year, began to swarm like the rabbit. Several families every year, and what families!

The result, disastrous for farming, is that from eighty to a hundred hares may be reckoned to every hectare, and that

A dozen or two of peons ride off at a gallop in no matter what direction, (no question as to the whereabouts of the game, since it is everywhere), to meet at a point out of sight and return at the top of their speed to the sportsmen. Then, long before you hear their shouts or see their outlines on the horizon, there suddenly appears along the uncertain line at which earth and sky meet a swarm of moving creatures which rush and part and cross each other in every direction. Whether near or far, it is impossible to say, since there are no objects to measure by. If far, all these black spots on the luminous background may be horns, and shortly the body—being really near while our inexperienced eye believes it far—will take the fantastic proportions which give the illusion of a herd of oxen.

Then suddenly the truth becomes manifest. You have before you some hundreds of hares which will quickly be within gunshot. But the animal is sharp to discern the danger, and in less time than it takes to write it, the troop that was heading in a mass straight upon the line of fire melts into every direction until only the foolish ones at the back are still making their way ahead at the pace acquired in the course of the race. In this way the carnage, which seemed to promise to be terrible, resolves itself into ten or twelve more or less lucky shots apace. This is inevitable since the wire fence that stops the course of the horse, ox, or sheep, cannot oppose the passage of running game.

The day that the destruction of the hares is decided upon, which is really necessary now, it will be sufficient to fence in three sides of an enclosure and drive the game toward the opening. In the present state of affairs the mere sight of 300 or 400 hares running straight toward the guns, even though they make a right about turn just in time, is an entertainment much relished by Europeans.

Shooting "a la corda" has a different aspect. The mounted peon forms a line of hunters a hundred yards apart. But unlike our own battues, the beater precedes the shooter instead of walking toward him. The reason is that every peon is attached to his comrade to right and to left by a rope of twisted wires which sweeps the ground and puts to alarm the rabbit, for the beater of the gun placed behind the rope, which he follows at the pace of a horse's walk. To tell the truth, the hare does not wait

of marking time. They run before one without haste, and evidently determined not to fly away. It occasionally happens that a sportsman wearies of this game and wants to end it. Several times I left the line of guns and ran upon the enemy, which, without any excitement, still kept its distance and never gave its pursuer the satisfaction of seeing it even hasten its steps. You look around you for a stone, a bit of wood, or a lump of earth which should have the effect of driving off the creature. On the Pampas is neither pebble nor stick, nor clod of earth. You have no resource but to swear and make violent gestures that have no effect at all.

The martinette has, too, a way of glancing sideways at you which expresses a profound contempt for the entire human race. All generous minds are sensitive to rudeness and feel a just vexation when thus treated. The rapid chase is the more painful that you have very soon before you several martinettes and as many partridges which fly backward and forward, leaving you in doubt at which to point your weapon, while at the same time you know that in thus leaving the line of fire you expose yourself to all the guns which may be tempted by fur or feathers to aim in your direction. There is only one way out of this critical situation that I know of. It is a cap lunged with steady hand at the running bird. He will fly off then and keep his distance. The victory would be yours afterward were it not that the chase under a sun that would seem hot even in Summer has left you out of breath. To take aim while struggling for breath is to risk missing the bird. Happily both partridges and martinettes have a straight, low, and heavy flight, which permits of your return to the estancia without dis-honor.

Such are the peripetias of this amusing form of sport, in which, all along the line, firing is incessant. The steady walk of the guns is only checked by the ropes getting caught occasionally on some tuft of grass, or by an encounter, not at all rare, with the carcass of horse or ox in process of transmutation into the great whole by too long protracted decomposition. Having left on his own initiative, he at least escapes from man's fatality. You pass without even having to hold your nose, so thoroughly does the strong, purifying air of the pampas carry away in its boundless currents every

With no other diversion but a distant ombu, a group of paratos, a rancho, or traveling herd, the murderous band pursues its eternal way. The walking is good, and the motor car which follows slowly in the rear is at hand to pick up the weary sportsmen. But before that point is reached one is tempted to cast off little by little the articles of clothing which rapidly become a burden under the sun's rays. A shirt and trousers are already much. Even so, a rest becomes necessary, and those who have any acquaintance with M. Villanueva will guess that there was not lacking a cart laden with refreshments.

Halts like these in the precious shade of the car are not without charm, if you have taken the wise precaution to put on something warm. When the incidents of the day have been thoroughly discussed, the chase is resumed, but if you are really done up do not imagine the fun is over. The auto will take your place in the line of march. It is into the open peons and apart from the game of running after martinettes, nothing is changed. For the endless prairie is so truly a billiard table or turf that not a jolt need be felt and after a few attempts, one gets the knack of aiming from the car with a good average of successful shots. The martinette and partridge get off more easily. It must be admitted that the experienced chauffeur is a powerful auxiliary. In any case if your shooting be less brilliant, the pleasure of a restful run enhanced by a fusillade sustained under all kinds of unforeseen circumstances, more than compensates for the misses, and lends a flavor to the sport that is lacking in European shooting parties.

Better still. The day is slowly dying. Soon the party will break up, but the shooting will go on all the same. The silent peons come up to say good-night. Dumbly, with courteous gestures, final greetings are exchanged, and then the order is given to set the helm for Eldorado. But there is still light enough to see by. What would the game think if when the motor has stopped it into the open we took no notice? So here we are zigzagging across the pampas in complicated turns and twists, according as one spot or another appears more favorable for game. And the slaughter is terrific, for the hares abound. Martinette and partridge with their dark plumage have nothing to fear from us now. In the faint light of the setting sun the hare makes still an admirable target, and plover and falcon offer supplementary diversions. The gay little owl alone finds grace with the guns. And when the "dark light" of the poet left us no resource but to shoot at other, pity, or perhaps fear of the last agony, sufficed to make us hold our hand. Gentle horned beasts moved out of our way, fixing on us their stupidly soft eyes and leaving us wholly remorseless, while in the freshening breeze and empty blackness of sky and land we burst in upon the hares of hospitable Eldorado.

This simple tale of a day's sport in the pampas has no other merit than that of being strictly accurate. The Argentines might very well content themselves with the pleasures they have ready to their hand at all seasons of the year, for in these regions half way between barbarism and civilization the gamekeeper is unknown. But man can never be content with what is offered to him. Therefore the wealthy *estanciero* takes infinite trouble to get thousands of pheasants sent out to him from our coverts so that he may breed them in his preserves. In districts that are not menaced by the locusts, the birds will be let loose shortly in the woods, and the Argentine will then pride herself on shooting such as that of Saint-Germain. In view of this misfortune, I have set down this account of what will soon belong to a vanished age.